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God has given to us, I believe, all the liberality of use, but only so far as necessary; and He has determined that the use should be common. And it is monstrous for one to live in luxury, while many are in want. How much more glorious is it to do good to many, than to live sumptuously! How much wiser to spend money on human beings, than on jewels and gold! How much more useful to acquire decorous friends, than lifeless ornaments! Justo L. González

Miguel  
y  
Pacheco

**The Year 2016: Where Will We Be by Then?**  
Justo L. González

San Tom  
Flor y  
oliver

**A New Vision: Ministry Through Hispanic Eyes**  
Luis G. Pedraja

por las  
mujeres  
latinas

**On Becoming 'Apiru: An Agenda for Latino Theology**

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C. Gilbert Romero

**Apuntes bibliográficos**  
Pablo A. Jiménez

**Reflexiones**  
Laden with store of gold."<sup>1</sup>

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## PRESENTACION

The first article in this issue is a recognition of the work of one of the foremost Latino preachers and homileticsians of our age. Dr. Cecilio Arrastía, a former professor at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, at St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary, and at a number of institutions, passed away last December. In his article, Prof. **Carmelo Alvarez**, Executive Secretary of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, and currently a visiting professor at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, renders tribute to Arrastía's work and talent.

Our second article is also offered in recognition of another of our leaders, although in more joyous circumstances. Dr. Roy Barton, former Director of the Mexican-American Program and also the founding manager of *Apuntes*, has been honored upon his retirement by the establishment of a Barton Lectureship at Perkins School of Theology. This is the first lecture in that series, delivered by our editor, and included here at the request of those present on the occasion. Although it deals specifically with Perkins and its Mexican-American Program, it is published here in the expectation that much of what is said there with reference to that particular program is similarly relevant to others.

Finally, Dr. **Luis G. Pedraja**, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Perkins School of Theology, and Dr. **Gilbert Romero**, a former university chaplain and parish priest at St. Thomas More in Alhambra, California, challenge us to produce a theology with the people and for the people. Dr. Pedraja does this on the basis of his experiences and formation as a believer and a theologian, and Dr. Romero on the basis of an episode in biblical history.

**Apuntes** (ISSN # 0279-9790) is published quarterly by the Mexican American Program, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX 75275. Second class postage paid at Dallas, TX 75260 and additional mailing offices. Subscription is \$10.00 per year.

**POSTMASTER**, send address changes to: *Apuntes*, Mexican American Program, Perkins School of Theology, Southern University, Dallas, TX 75275.

**Manuscripts** are to be sent to our editorial offices: *Apuntes*, Justo L. González, Editor, 336 Columbia Dr., Decatur, GA 30030. **Materials sent in an IBM compatible system are much appreciated.**

Mailing and printing of *Apuntes* are provided by the United Methodist Publishing House.



## Cecilio Arrastía: Elogio a la elocuencia

Carmelo E. Alvarez

Por comunicación desde Puerto Rico, y a través del amigo mutuo, Lucas Torres, nos enteramos de la partida del buen amigo y hermano, Cecilio Arrastía. Quisiera no dejar pasar más tiempo sin expresar en estas breves cuartillas mi sentir y pensar sobre Cecilio. Dejo para una futura ocasión la elaboración de un trabajo más minucioso y detenido, que dé cuenta de la valiosa contribución de Cecilio a la homilética latinoamericana, caribeña e hispana en los Estados Unidos. En esas encrucijadas forjó él su práctica como predicador y como maestro de homilética.

Lo conocí siendo yo muy niño. Aconteció en el Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico. Era a través de mi padre que lográbamos conocer a figuras del calibre de Cecilio. Su figura me impresionó por ser todo un caballero de la elegancia en el vestir, el gesticular y el hablar. Yo no sabía que Cecilio era el predicador que ya para esa época descollaba con su gran elocuencia. Para mí su presencia ya mostraba su elocuencia. El historiador del protestantismo cubano Marcos A. Ramos, en su obra definitiva y valiosa, nos dice sobre Cecilio:

Arrastía ha sido sin duda el más importante orador religioso producido por el protestantismo cubano y algunos lo consideran el más elocuente predicador evangélico en la América Latina.<sup>1</sup>

Cuando lo escuché predicar me fascinó su elocuencia, el manejo del idioma, su vuelo e imaginación homilética. ¡Me gustaba irme solo a engolar la voz tratando de imitar su acento cubano, mezclado con una sonoridad muy propia, que no dejaba de impresionarme! Yo desde niño quise ser predicador, y me gustaba indagar y rebuscar en la impresionante y rica biblioteca de mi padre. Ya para los once años mi mamá me había preparado, con sus *Guía del hogar*, una revista argentina que traía bosquejo de sermones, para mi primera predicación. Mi entrenadora se preocupaba que escribiera completo el texto y que pronunciara cada palabra con corrección. Mi madre fue esa entrenadora, mi padre fue el inspirador, Cecilio fue el predicador a imitar. ¡Qué excelente combinación!

Yo nunca he pretendido ser un predicador elocuente, pero sí un convencido de que los buenos predicadores deben tener al menos cuatro

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<sup>1</sup> Marcos Antonio Ramos, *Panorama del Protestantismo en Cuba* (San José: Editorial Caribe, 1986), p. 413.

cualidades esenciales: convicción, claridad, alegría y pasión. Cecilio tuvo todas esas cualidades que lo hicieron un predicador elocuente y un excelente maestro de homilética.

La primera cualidad: convicción. Cecilio y todas las generaciones que estudiamos con Angel M. Mergal aprendimos que un predicador recibe el llamado para la tarea, pero se forja, se forma, se cultiva con la buena lectura, la imaginación atrevida y la profundidad en la reflexión teológica. Mergal decía: "Cuando no tengas nada convincente que decir en el púlpito, ora y siéntate". Mi padre siempre me decía: "No asumas siempre que vas a tener éxito en la predicación. Prepárate para asimilar los fracasos y deja al Espíritu que te dé los éxitos". Esa convicción tiene que estar sostenida por una fe iluminada, que une mente y corazón. Decía uno de los más eminentes predicadores de este siglo, el Dr. Fred. B. Craddock, que el predicador no da un discurso teológico, pero sí fundamenta teológicamente lo que está comunicando. Si no cree lo que predica y lo vive corazón adentro, nunca llegará a ser un predicador elocuente.<sup>2</sup> Cecilio mismo lo expresa con gran precisión: "Rescatar al púlpito de la frivolidad y la improvisación irresponsable y devolverlo a una predicación que, sin rechazar la emoción que produce la contemplación de la Verdad, razone, medite, y profundice."<sup>3</sup> ¡Y Mergal nos dejó unas palabras que se quedaron grabadas para siempre!: "La vocación de un predicador no es para hacer sermones, sino para hacer cristianos."<sup>4</sup>

Por allí había un libro de Héctor Pereyra, *Hacia la elocuencia*,<sup>5</sup> que daba muchos consejos útiles y prácticos de cómo prepararse para hacer discursos elocuentes. Era más un manual de oratoria que un libro sobre homilética, que no era la especialidad del autor. Mergal mismo escribió el ya citado *Arte cristiano de la predicación*, que fue el fruto de sus años como profesor de homilética en el Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico. Allí combina lo práctico con lo teórico, en un libro que sigue siendo pertinente para entender esa tarea de prepararse para la proclamación del Evangelio. Pero tiene que haber esa "comezón", esa inquietud que mueve e impele a proclamar a voz en cuello la Buenas Nuevas. En

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<sup>2</sup> Sus libros *Overhearing the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978), *As One Without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979) y su clásico *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), son valiosísimas contribuciones a la homilética contemporánea.

<sup>3</sup> Cecilio Arrastía, "Un prólogo y algo más" en Osvaldo Mottesi, *Predicación y misión* (Miami: LOGOI, 1989), p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Angel M. Mergal, *Arte cristiano de la predicación* (México: CUPSA, 1951), p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> Héctor Pereyra, *Hacia la elocuencia* (El Paso: Casa Bautista de Publicaciones, 1963).



esta misma línea de pensamiento se podría decir que la persona que predica reconoce su fragilidad humana y los límites que lo ponen frente a frente al Misterio. Sin embargo, se sabe asistido por aquella otra convicción: "¡Cuán glorioso sobre los montes los pies del que trae alegres nuevas, del que anuncia la paz, del que trae nuevas del bien, del que publica salvación, del que dice a Sión: ¡Tu Dios reina!" (Isaías 52:7). Y la no menos importante de Pablo: "Porque no nos predicamos a nosotros mismos sino a Jesucristo como Señor, y a nosotros como vuestros siervos por amor de Jesús" (I Corintios 4: 5).

Sobre la convicción Cecilio nos dejó estas palabras tan atinadas:

Se predica con certidumbre, desde la certidumbre de que 'algo' habrá de suceder como resultado de la predicación. No hablamos de un 'complejo mesiánico' centrado en la personalidad o el carisma de quienes predicán. Este 'algo' puede o no, ser visible en el momento en que se predica; puede que se deje ver mucho después, en el *kairos* de Dios y no en el *kronos* de los seres humanos que predicán. Puede o no ser espectacular ... Pero si no creemos que la predicación ha de ser fructífera-*portadora de frutos*-y fehaciente-*hacedora de fe*-le falta a la ecuación un factor fundamental.<sup>6</sup>

La segunda cualidad es la claridad. Mergal decía "ten una idea, tu idea, clara en la mente". Hay predicadores que divagan sin precisión ni claridad porque sencillamente no tienen claros para ellos mismos las ideas que están tratando de comunicar. Para ello hay que ejercitarse en los recursos y las destrezas de memorización y dominar el bosquejo o el texto completo (si lo tuviere) para predicar con seguridad y aplomo. Aquí otra vez nos esmeramos en la preparación y estudio y dejamos que el Espíritu nos sorprenda y aclare más allá de nuestra capacidad humana. En palabras de Cecilio, con acierto una vez más:

Es posible que en la ansiedad por hacer visible el movimiento, se pierda la claridad. Cuando andamos a paso rápido, perdemos de vista muchas cosas. Si la transparencia del agua se pierde, ésta no es agradable al sediento. El metal del sermón no vibra: 'es címbalo que retiñe' (1 Co. 13) cuando la clarinada pierde su acento.<sup>7</sup>

La tercera cualidad: la alegría. Sí, para predicar hay que sentir gozo y

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<sup>6</sup> Cecilio Arrastía, *Teoría y práctica de la predicación* (Miami: Editorial Caribe, 1978), p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

alegría. Ello no quiere decir que no tengamos momentos en que nos sentimos compungidos o tristes. Sólo nos advierte que hay que deleitarse en la proclamación y deleitar con buen gusto, ternura y buena disposición a la congregación. Ese deleite es el gozo de nuestra salvación. Un real disfrute de la vida, de la experiencia de adoración donde el culto se da y realmente disfrutar de un espacio de comunicación y comunión. Cecilio colocó la alegría entre lo que llamó "vibraciones" que debe tener la persona que predica: "La predicación debe hacerse con **euforia** y ésta es una voz griega que significa *portador, cargador de lo bueno*. Las personas que predicán el Evangelio no llevan lo *bueno* son portadores de lo *mejor*".<sup>8</sup>

La cuarta cualidad: La pasión. Si al principio hablamos de convicción éste es el culmen de un predicador bien motivado. Se siente motivado, entusiasmado. Quiere contagiar a la comunidad con su mensaje y su reto. Conmovido llega al púlpito asistido por un desafío a proclamar un mensaje que se le ha encomendado. "Predicar es exponer; y si no se tiene dentro, como fuego ardiente lo que se quiere compartir con otros, entonces no hay exposición-no hay sermón".<sup>9</sup> ¡Y el predicador lo asume responsablemente y con determinación! Como decía el profesor Domenico Grasso, "decir con coraje (arrojo) la verdad a los oyentes",<sup>10</sup> pero asistido por la humildad. ¡Para proclamar hay que estar persuadido de que Aquella verdad ahora nos convoca y nos invita; nos cuestiona y nos envía al mundo! Esa pasión está cimbrada en la Pasión que resume todas las pasiones, el drama de la crucifixión, donde todas las cruces son asumidas y quebradas. "La tarea del predicador es, sencillamente, la de sacudir el polvo que los siglos, las luchas de la Iglesia, las aberraciones teológicas, los cambios sociales, y los fenómenos lingüísticos han ido poniendo sobre el cuadro monumental que es la redención del hombre(sic)".<sup>11</sup>

Estoy convencido que Cecilio poseía esas cualidades que le dieron las credenciales de orador sagrado elocuente. El otro ingrediente esencial: una vocación pastoral, amor por las personas, compasión por los débiles y menesterosos; ternura y emoción en la persistente tarea de proclamar a tiempo y fuera de tiempo. Una vez más Cecilio lo dice con elocuencia: "En nuestra concepción personal todo sermón debe tener un componente pastoral ... tiene que

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>10</sup> Domenico Grasso, *Teología de la predicación*, trad. por J.A. Paredes y R. Rincón (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1968), p. 308.

<sup>11</sup> Cecilio Arrastía, *Jesucristo, Señor del pánico* (México: CUPSA, 1964), p. 8.



tener un elemento pastoral que edifique y afirme; que consuele y levante; ala y raíz; juicio pero con gracia".<sup>12</sup>

Cecilio, además, nos dejó un legado de libros escritos: sermones, un excelente libro de homilética y una buena cantidad de artículos con consejos y observaciones para la predicación pastoral. Deja, como complemento a todo ello, amigos y amigas que lo admiramos, respetamos y recordaremos siempre.

Yo le agradezco personalmente la colaboración que me dio cuando yo fungía como rector del Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano. Como presidente de la comisión de evaluación del Seminario, en 1980, unido a gentes del calibre de Tomás J. Liggett, nos ofreció y propició elementos fundamentales para corregir, aprender y continuar. Su amistad invariable, diáfana y sincera lo coloca a la estatura de las personas que saben predicar el Evangelio ... y vivirlo. Al final de su libro Cecilio lo resume así:

Predicar es *invertir* la totalidad de la persona llamada-mente, corazón, voluntad, emociones--un santo alboroto que quiebre el silencio mortal, el letargo suicida que vive la sociedad. Es derperter, con solemne ruido, a quienes duermen el sueño de la muerte.

A esto, que no a otra cosa, nos llama Dios.<sup>13</sup>

Creo que esa es la diadema más importante que le puede corresponder a un verdadero predicador del Evangelio, que traza la Palabra con convicción, claridad, alegría y pasión, logrando así ser ... elocuente.

### Summary

*Cecilio Arrastía was an outstanding and eloquent preacher in both Latin American/Caribbean and Hispanic U.S. churches. For more than four decades Cecilio Arrastía was an inspiration to pastors and congregations, both in the pulpit and in the classroom. His eloquence was based on principles of preaching which underlined conviction, clarity, joy and passion, as key to any sucessful preaching.. The article praises Cecilio's life as an example of an authentic preacher of the Gospel. In friendship and in loyalty to his colleagues, the churches and the Gospel, he was a faithful servant.*

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<sup>12</sup> Cecilio Arrastía, "Un prólogo y algo más", en Osvaldo Mottesí, *Predicación y misión*, p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> Cecilio Arrastía, *Teoría y práctica de la predicación*, p. 223.

## The Year 2016: Where Will We Be by Then?

*Justo L. González*

It is customary to begin a presentation such as this<sup>1</sup> by declaring that it is a pleasure to be here. And indeed, it is a pleasure to be here, after a good meal, with good friends... But in another sense, I must confess that I am not pleased to be here. I had already declared my calendar for 1996 closed. I was looking forward to staying at home and working on my yard and my manuscripts. (I once told my wife that I felt pregnant with a book, and she remarked, "It must at least be triplets!"). 1996 was to be my year to stay at home and smell the flowers. Actually, I was going to stay at home so much that Delta Airlines might even go broke!

And then came the call. Not from God, but from the Dean (and I understand that in a place such as this sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference!). Would I come and deliver the first of the Barton lectures?

I could easily have said no to the Dean. I have often said no to God. But to Roy Barton, there is no way I could say no.

And so I am here: pleased to be here, and yet in a way wishing I were somewhere else; enjoying the food and the company, and yet fretting at impending deadlines and bushes to be trimmed. I am here partly because I did indeed wish to be here, but first and foremost because I *had* to be here; because I was given the opportunity to honor Roy Barton--and I know very few people who are as worthy as he is of such honor.

A great poet and patriot in my native land once said that "honrar honra." Literally, "to honor honors"; but since that does not make much sense in English, one could say that to render honor results in honor for oneself. Thus, I am here to honor Dr. Barton; but in so doing I am acutely aware that it is also an honor for me to do so--with the great difference that he deserves such honor much more than I do.

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<sup>1</sup> The was a lecture delivered on February 6, 1996, at Perkins School of Theology. It was the inaugural lecture of the Barton Lectureship, established in honor of Dr. Roy D. Barton upon his retirement. It is included here both as a tribute to Roy and his work in founding and supporting *Apuntes*, and as a more general reflection on theological education and the Latino presence in it during the coming decades.



Then, I must confess another reason why I have been uneasy about this particular lecture. For weeks and weeks I turned the question over and over in my mind: What would be appropriate for an occasion such as this? How might I best honor Roy, and at the same time say something of significance to this community that knows his work and his achievements as well as I do?

Then it occurred to me that what has been Roy's unique gift to our Hispanic community is his ability to share our dreams and to bring them to fruition. I well remember the day, some seventeen years ago, when Roy and a few others of us sat around a table in Los Angeles and dreamed about a journal of Hispanic theology. It was Roy who took the dream with him and found practical ways in which such a journal could be funded and produced. We are now beginning the sixteenth year of uninterrupted publication of *Apuntes*, a journal that has made a significant impact in the theological and ecclesiastical communities, both Hispanic and not. Were it not for Roy, we would now be in the seventeenth year of dreaming about a journal!

Thus, I would suggest that the best way in which we can honor Roy and his work is to continue a similar process--to continue dreaming the dreams and seeing the visions and to trust that this Perkins community, and the Mexican American Program within it, and the United Methodist Church, and the entire Church Catholic, will find ways to give flesh to those dreams, in the service of God's Reign.

Therefore, tonight I would invite you to dream with me, to dream with the Hispanic community. Roy's work here at Perkins covers approximately two decades. Let us dream tonight about a similar evening twenty years hence, already well into the twenty-first century, and what we would hope people will be able to say then about what has been accomplished by Perkins School of Theology and the Mexican American Program within it.

Most of all, I would hope that, on that not too distant evening in February, 2016, Perkins graduates will be able to say that this school prepared them for the multicultural society in which they are living. I need not bore you with statistics. You do not have to be a statistician nor an expert in census figures to know that already there are large sections of Texas and the Southwest where a pastor who does not know how to relate to Hispanic culture is ipso facto cut off from more than half of his or her potential community. Furthermore, the growth of the Latino community is such that, even if the border were to be hermetically shut tomorrow--which is not likely--by the year 2016 it will be virtually impossible for a pastor to serve anywhere in the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii, without being presented with the need and the opportunity for Hispanic ministries.

The reasons for this are obvious, and although I promised not to bore you with statistics, allow me to give you just one set of figures whose implications are so far-reaching that I doubt you will find them boring. The growth rate of the general population in the United States during the baby boom years was an astounding 1.8% per year. Now it is slightly under half as much (just below 0.9% per year). The present rate among Hispanics, not counting immigration, is just below 3% per year. Both rates are declining as the population ages. At the present rate of decline, Hispanic population growth (again, not counting any possible immigration) in the year 2016 will be approximately 1.8% per year--the same rate as that of the general population during the much vaunted baby-boom years. Twenty years after that, Hispanic population growth will have finally declined to approximately 0.9% per year. At that point, the general population will have reached zero population growth. Thus, within a population whose total is not growing, there will be one segment that will still be growing at a rate of almost 1% per year. That is why I say that it will be impossible to be a responsible pastor anywhere in the United States and not take this fact into account.

The population shifts that are taking place in the United States should be evident to anyone who takes even a cursory look at the census and its various projections--or to anyone who walks our cities or looks at our fields. If I give you statistics about Latino population, that is because these are both the ones that I know best and also the most striking ones. But when one looks at the total picture this must also be seen as part of a general population shift, in which that segment of the population that up to now has grown accustomed to thinking of itself as the majority will find that it is one more minority among many.

Let me put it as bluntly as I can: the population shifts that are taking place before our very eyes are nothing short of cataclysmic, and the church ignores them at its own peril. Today there are many in our United Methodist denomination, as well as in practically every other so-called mainline Protestant denomination in the United States, bewailing our loss of membership, and recalling with nostalgia the time when we were nine million. If we fail to see the connection between that loss of membership and the population shifts that are taking place, in the year 2016 the same voices, now older and very tired, will still be bewailing our loss of membership, and remembering with nostalgia the time when we were five million.

On a more positive note, the question is, what will it take, so that the vision that I am trying to present before you will come true, and in that not too distant evening in February, 2016, Perkins graduates will be able to say that this school prepared them for the multicultural society in which they are living?

This can be answered at two levels. Since this is a lecture in honor of Roy



Barton, let me begin by responding as he would, in practical terms--in those terms that are absolutely necessary so that our dreams may have legs and walk. In practical terms, what will be required is that this seminary, as well as all the seminaries of the church, become so convinced of the reality of the challenge that it is placed at the very core of the curriculum, that students in homiletics are encouraged to reflect on what it means to preach to a multicultural church in a multicultural society; that students in education courses are challenged with the task of teaching how to live in a multicultural world in view of God's even more multicultural future; that history, theology, Bible, sociology, counseling, the entire curriculum, force each and every student, no matter of what ethnic and cultural background, to face the issues of ministry in the coming multicultural twenty-first century.

In even more concrete terms, and referring again to Roy's work and to the Mexican-American Program, I would say that in the very early years the Mexican-American Program was conceived in terms of providing opportunities in theological education to Mexican-Americans. In more recent times and under Roy's leadership, without leaving that first goal aside, the Mexican-American Program has also seen its function as one of presence: to make the Latino reality be present and felt at Perkins and in the church at large. What is now needed, with a view to that evening in February, 2016, is for the entire seminary community to realize that, much as the Mexican-American Program and the Hispanic church needs Perkins, Perkins needs that Program and that community even more. Only so will the graduates of this institution, on that evening in February, 2016, be able to stand up and say: "I am grateful that what I learned in these halls has been truly relevant to my ministry and my community."

Similarly, if I may speak of the United Methodist Church at large, what is needed is, not just for General Conference to fund the National Hispanic Plan for one more quadrennium--necessary as that is--but for the entire United Methodist Church to see the National Hispanic Plan for what it is: as an opportunity--perhaps one of its last opportunities--to rediscover its sense of mission in this nation and in this society. In very practical terms, we must pray, and lobby, and argue, and fight, for the Mexican American Program at Perkins and for the National Hispanic Plan in the United Methodist Church, because without them both Perkins and the United Methodist Church would be much the poorer. It is for a similar reason that many of us pray, and lobby, and argue, and fight, for the Rio Grande Conference and its ministry--not because we love it so (which we do) but because we are convinced that without it the United Methodist Church would be so much the poorer. And we must also pray, and lobby, and argue, and fight, so that the United Methodist Church, while increasing its total involvement in the National Hispanic Plan, will also develop similar plans for other minorities that are currently underrepresented in our ranks.

All of this, and more along those lines, I would set as my agenda for the turn of the millennium if I were the Director of the Mexican American Program, or a seminary dean, or a bishop, or a delegate to General Conference.

But then, I am not--and do not feel called to be--any of the above. I am not a practical person like Roy Barton. I am an historian. I deal with times past and people dead. Still, I have tried always to remember that, when I decided to go into Church History, and my brother into Old Testament, our mother said, "Is either of you two ever going to deal with anybody who is still living?" In her own wise way, she was saying something similar to Nietzsche when he insisted that we need for history to be "vom Leben und zum Tat"--from life and toward action.

Thus, partly out of my mother's wisdom, partly out of Nietzsche's, and partly for other reasons, I have come to conceive my task as an historian, not so much as delving into the past for the sake of the past, but rather as reflecting on the past for the sake of the present and of the future.

When, as an historian of that sort, I look at the challenge I have been trying to describe, I become convinced that it is comparable to the challenge which the early church had to face as it moved from being a Jewish sect to proclaiming a faith for the entire world. Significantly, as we look at that transition from this side of the events, we tend to see it as entirely positive move, with no difficulty save the resistance of those too recalcitrant to see the movement of the Spirit. But from the other side things did not seem as easy. It must have been painful, extremely painful, for Jews brought up in ancestral traditions--in traditions based on God's acts in history--suddenly to hear the astonishing words that in Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek. Can you hear the anguish, the agony, in Peter's words to Cornelius: "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean"?

In that regard, allow me to call your attention to a passage that is not often cited in this connection. It is from the Revelation of John:

So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, "Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth." So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. Then they said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

If any writer of the New Testament was a Jew, and steeped in his own culture and traditions, that was John of Patmos. It has been pointed out that there



is hardly a verse in his book that does not have an allusion to the Hebrew Scriptures. His Greek is full of Hebraisms, perhaps due in part to his greater familiarity with Hebrew and with Aramaic, and perhaps as a result of his constant literary dependence on the Hebrew Bible. And he quotes that Bible, not from the Septuagint that all the other New Testament authors employed, but either from an unknown translation or perhaps even from his own, which he does as he goes along.

But now he, John who loves his people and his culture, is told, not as we would expect, and as others in the Bible are told, to go throughout the world, to many peoples and nations and languages and kings. Rather, he is to go back to his audience, presumably the seven churches and other similar communities in Asia, and speak to them *about* the many peoples, and nations, and languages, and kings. And that is why the word of God, the little scroll that will be John's message, although sweet to the taste, is hard to stomach.

John the Jew; John who can quote the Hebrew Scriptures back and forth, apparently without even bothering to think about it, is given a message to proclaim to his congregations. His congregations are probably also mostly Jewish. Otherwise, they would hardly be able to understand this book he is writing to them, so full of allusions to the Hebrew Scriptures, and even to more recent Jewish traditions. And now he is told that he is to speak to these congregations, not just the word they expect, that those who are faithful until death will receive the crown of life, or that everyone who conquers will receive some of the hidden manna, and a white stone with a secret name, but he is to speak to them about "many peoples, and nations, and languages, and kings." He is to speak to them, not only about how important it is that they be faithful in the impending tribulations and persecution, but also about "saints from every tribe and language and people and nation," whom the Lamb has made "to be a kingdom and priests serving God, and who will reign on earth." And that is bitter to his good Jewish stomach, as it is bitter to the stomach of any of us who are deeply steeped in our own cultural traditions.

All of this serves to remind us that, while the encounter of many peoples and cultures is intellectually and emotionally enriching, it is also painful, and many people feel justified to resent it. As the old certainties provided by more limited horizons are challenged by people coming out of different experiences, many respond in fear and bitterness. They did in Jerusalem as they tried to get rid of a troublesome Galilean and his Galilean followers. They did in the Middle Ages, when Greeks and Latins decided they would rather have nothing to do with each other. And they do even today, when people arm themselves and perpetrate acts of terrorism in defense of racial purity and supposedly Christian values. And even though we may not go to such extremes, we must all confess that we are all

tempted to privilege our own people, our own tribe, our own language, our own nation.

This is the real challenge of the coming multicultural society. It was fairly easy, some years ago, to raise money and enthusiasm in our churches to go preach the gospel to all the nations, to tell all peoples, and tribes, and nations, about this wondrous gift that was ours. It is much more difficult to tell ourselves, our own people, and tribe, and language, and nation, that this puts all the peoples, and tribes, and nations, and languages on an equal footing. And yet, this is what we must do today and in the decades to come. We must tell the United Methodist Church--we must tell those who have been traditionally dominant in the United Methodist Church--*about* the many tribes, and languages, and nations, and peoples wherein lies the calling and the future of the United Methodist Church and of the entire Church Catholic.

Again, this will not be easy. At this point I am reminded of the experience of Paul and Barnabas in Antioch of Pisidia, as it is told in Acts 13. A point that we often miss in that story is that when Paul spoke at the synagogue on the first sabbath, his hearers were quite happy and impressed by what he said, and they even urged them to come and speak to them again on the next sabbath. But by the time the next sabbath came around, things have changed. Now "almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord." Acts then tells us that "when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy," and began contradicting and rejecting all that Barnabas and Paul said. In other words, as long as theirs was a message about the great things that God had done for them, the members of this synagogue were quite pleased. They even appear to be quite content that the message is also for a few Gentile God-fearers. But when the entire city gathers to hear the word of the Lord, when there is a threat that the synagogue will be taken over by Gentiles, things are quite different.

Likewise, when Jesus preached his famous sermon in Luke 4, people were quite happy to hear that the prophecy was being fulfilled before their eyes. They had no problem with that. The problem came when Jesus began reminding them that in the time of Elijah God chose to feed a widow, not in Jerusalem or even in Judea, but in far-away, Gentile Zarephath in Sidon; and in the time of Elisha, God chose to heal, not any of the many lepers in Judea or even in Galilee, but rather God chose to heal Naaman, the general in the enemy Syrian army.

And today, the greatest threat to the National Hispanic Plan does not come from lack of interest or lack of success. The greatest threat comes from fear that it might succeed all too well, and in twenty years the United Methodist Church will no longer be recognizable as a white, middle-class, mainline denomination. And the greatest difficulty that the Mexican-American Program will



face as it seeks to fulfill its mission within Perkins School of Theology will likewise be, not the outright opposition of clearly racist elements, but the fear that it might succeed all too well, and that twenty years hence, on that evening in February, 2016, Perkins will no longer be a white, middle-class, but a multicultural, multicolor school, where experiences and perspectives from men and women, black, white, brown, red and yellow will all gain a hearing on an equal footing and with a view of service to the entire community.

I know that this is a difficult vision to swallow--just as it was difficult for John of Patmos to swallow the bittersweet roll with the message "about many peoples and nations and languages and kings." Yet, that is the vision that is required if, on that evening in February, 2016, we are not to be put to shame.

On the other hand, we must be careful not to romanticize cultures or multiculturalism. John of Patmos also makes that clear in his book, when he declares that after the two witnesses have completed their testimony and are killed, "for three and a half days members of the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb; and the inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to the inhabitants of the earth." And later on, when John is speaking of the beast from the sea, which appears all-powerful, and is therefore worshiped by the whole earth, he says: "It [that is, the beast] was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it." In other words, that every culture, and people, and tribe, and language, is corruptible, and that a multicultural society is not ipso facto a holier or better society.

It is important for us to remember this, for otherwise love of language and culture runs the risk of becoming demonic. It is when we forget this that love of language and culture result in ethnic cleansing, in theories of supremacy, and in racial and cultural exclusivism. It is important to remember this, for language and culture properly understood are to be represented in the great throng singing the praises of the Lamb; but language and culture turned into objects of idolatry are among the most insidious tools of the beast and the dragon. It is important for us to remember this, for multiculturalism in the service of God's reign is a true and beautiful sign of that reign; but multiculturalism as an excuse for an "everything goes" society is a sure sign of the worship of the beast.

Then, John of Patmos calls us to be realistic in our understanding of multiculturalism is another way. He reminds us that culture always exists in a political and economic context. Thus, when describing the great harlot of chapter 17 he says: "The waters where the whore is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages."

If we accept the most common interpretation, that the great harlot is the city of Rome and its imperial power, it follows that John of Patmos has a very realistic understanding of the wealth of Rome. Rome is wealthy, not because she is particularly productive, and certainly not because her people work harder than the many peoples, tribes, nations and languages she has subjected, but rather because she has devised a system whereby the wealth of all these nations flows to Rome, as so many rivers.

We all know that the first century was a time of great mixing of cultures. And nowhere was this mixture more evident than in Rome itself, where people from all over the Empire converged. We also know that the more aristocratic and traditional Romans bemoaned the fact that their city was being overrun by all these people of various tribes, and nations, and languages. Actually, at approximately the same time that John was at Patmos, or shortly thereafter, Tacitus complained that Rome was a receptacle to which flowed everything that was sordid and degrading from every quarter of the globe (Annals 15.44). Others took the opposite tack, accepting quite wholeheartedly at least some of the elements of foreign culture that were invading even the most traditional quarters of Rome. But, as far as I know, it was John of Patmos who most clearly saw that the nations, and tribes, and peoples, and languages were present in Rome, not simply out of cultural exchange, but also because Rome was the great harlot sitting on many waters, and the many waters were the "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and languages" who actually produced the wealth that made the harlot great.

It is important for us to realize this, for the cultural encounters of our day do not take place in abstraction of economic and political systems. It is not just that world travel has become easier, and therefore people of different cultures meet more often than they used to. It is also that the world order--or rather, the world disorder--is such that people are forced to leave their traditional homes, and move to new lands in search of safety, security, freedom, and work. All other things being equal, most people would rather live where they grew up, in their own homelands and in the context of their own cultures. But all things are not equal, and therefore people cross borders and even oceans seeking the safety and the opportunities that are often denied them in their own homelands. When the rivers of wealth flow in one direction, it is only natural for population to flow in the same direction.

John of Patmos had it right. The multicultural society of the Roman Empire was not just the result of cultural exchange. It was also the result of economic exchange supported by military might. And, in some ways, the same is true of the multicultural society of the twentieth century. It is the result of European conquest and westward expansion. It is the result of black slavery and



the trade that supported it. It is the result of colonialism in the nineteenth century, and of economic neocolonialism in the twentieth. It is the result of two world wars and a cold one. It is the result of civil wars in Central America, fostered by the great superpowers. Thus, when we look at our communities, and see them as multicultural, multiethnic microcosms in which all the nations, cultures, languages and people of the world meet, it is important that we realize that this community is also the result of the vast forces, mostly evil forces, that have uprooted people, and tossed them upon distant shores. A multiethnic society is a microcosm, not only of ethnic diversity throughout the world, but also of the strife, injustice and oppression that rules the world--or as John of Patmos would say, of the power of the beast.

But John of Patmos also had it right on another score. He had it right in that the last word does not belong to the beast nor to the harlot drunk with the blood of the martyrs. Beyond his visions of beasts and dragons, there was the much stronger vision of the Lamb who, out of these many nations, and tribes, and peoples, and languages, will build a kingdom in which all have royal and priestly honor:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ... They are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

It is out of that vision that the United Methodist Church must be multicultural. It is out of that vision that the Mexican-American Program must play a central role in Perkins School of Theology. It is out of that long-term vision that we must draw our short-term vision of what we hope the graduates of this institution will say when they gather on that February evening twenty years from now.

The Hispanic National Plan must be central to the United Methodist Church; the Mexican-American Program must be central to Perkins School of Theology; multiculturalism must be central to the entire Church Catholic, because, to quote some of the great hymns of Revelation, our eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; because we know and we believe that on that waking-up

morning when the stars begin to fall, when we gather at the river where angel feet have trod, we shall all, from all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and languages, we shall all sing without ceasing: "Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee, casting down our golden crowns before the glassy sea; cherubim and seraphim; Japanese and Swahili; American and European; Cherokee and Ukrainian; falling down before thee, which wert, and art, and evermore shall be!" Amen!

### *Resumen*

*El presente artículo fue la conferencia inaugural de la serie que se proyecta en honor del Dr. Roy D. Barton. El autor discute lo que el seminario donde trabajó el Dr. Barton (y cualquier otra escuela de teología) deberán hacer para que de aquí a veinte años se pueda decir que ha sido fiel a su misión. Entre otras cosas, esto requiere que la presencia latina en el seminario impacte todos los aspectos de la institución, tales como currículo, personal docente, políticas administrativas, etc. En cierto modo, el seminario necesita más de la presencia latina que los latinos necesitan del seminario.*



## A New Vision: Ministry Through Hispanic Eyes

Luis G. Pedraja

In the writings of Alfred North Whitehead, he speaks of the limited perspectives with which we must all contend. Each of us understands reality from our own point of view, and we each interpret both God and the world around us from a given perspective. We all see life and reality from our own unique perspective. As a result, we all have something unique to contribute. At the same time, if we take our perspective and render it into an absolute norm for all, it becomes oppressive and distorted.<sup>1</sup> This has great implications for both our theology and our ministry.

Our location in a given time and place limits our perspective. Since we encounter God in our experiences and understand God from our own perspectives, we need to be aware of their limitations and of the role they play in our lives and ministry. We function and interpret reality within the context of these experiences and perspectives, and we build our universals and ideals out of them.<sup>2</sup> As we encounter God in our experiences, we create our own vision of God. But in our limited and finite nature, we also are tempted continually to reduce the totality of an infinite God to the bounds of our own little world. Thus, we trap God and ourselves in one set of experiences and miss the rich diversity at our doorstep. Similarly, when we impose our ideologies and perspectives on others as normative, our perspectives become instruments of oppression that silence their voices and visions of both God and reality.

I want to open your eyes to a new perspective in the hopes of fostering a new vision in your ministry. I do not know if I will succeed, but I will try. My intentions are not to speak on behalf of all Hispanics. Nor do I intend to speak on behalf of a few Hispanics. To do so would be quite difficult. I can only speak on behalf of one Hispanic. I can only speak for myself and hope that in my voice others will find their voice as well. You will also be relieved to know that I do not intend to give a lecture on systematic theology. Instead, I hope to share with you my perspective and my vision. I hope to share with you how my ministry to Hispanics and my life experiences as a Hispanic affect the way I do both theology

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<sup>1</sup> Whitehead calls this tendency to reduce everything to a given abstraction while ignoring other aspects of the given reality the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness." *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978), pp. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> According to Whitehead we interpret reality out of a given perspective and through particular abstractions from our sense perception. *Adventure of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1933, 1967), pp. 198-99; 219.

and ministry. And I do this in the hopes of offering you a new perspective for doing ministry and theology.

When I was a child, God was very real to me. I was born in Cuba under the communist government of Fidel Castro. Times were hard. Food, clothing, and medicines were often scarce. Electricity, water, and other utilities were in short supply. Although I did not realize it at the time, my parents often went without so that I would not go hungry. I lacked many things in those days, but God was real in the love of my family and in the life of the church.

Across the street from our house stood the old town Cathedral. I often played catch with the priests on the street and watched from my balcony as the people went in to pray. My faith was a simple faith, but it was a real faith full of conviction and power. God was not an abstract intangible reality. God was not an universal, immutable, impassible abstraction. God was real. As a child, I saw the whole world as sacred. God was in the Cathedral across the street and in the prayers of the people who went there every day. God was real in the Spring storms and in the night skies. God was a tangible reality at work in the world and in the people who came to that Cathedral every day. In my eyes, God was really there with us.

One day I was surprised to see an unusually large crowd entering the Cathedral. I had never seen so many people gather at the church. So I asked my mother why so many people were going to Church on that particular day. She told me that they were going to church because it was Good Friday. I did not understand what that meant, so I asked her what it meant. My mother sat down next to me and explained to me that Good Friday was when people remembered the day when God's son was killed. I broke down and cried. At the time, I had heard the stories of Jesus and I cherished the thoughts of a living God. So I could not understand why anyone would want to kill God's son.

That night, I saw people line up in front of the Cathedral. My parents and I went across the street to the Cathedral and lined up to participate in the ceremony. As I entered the Cathedral I saw near the altar a life-size statue of the dead Jesus, and the people were lining up to kiss its feet. As my parents took me by the hand and joined the line, I began to cry. My parents tried to make me kiss the feet of Jesus, but I refused to go. I refused to go because I did not want to kiss the feet of a dead God. I think that my theology has grown since those days, but I also think that it was in those early days that I first became a theologian.

In my youth, God and religion were not objects of critical reflection bound by lofty ideals and abstract philosophical constructs. They were found in the faith, hope, and heart of the people. I spent many years in universities and seminaries



studying philosophy and theology. And although philosophy and critical reflection have enriched my theologizing, I find that I must continually return to the experiences of those people whose faith led them to pray to a living God and to kiss the feet of a dead Jesus.

In the lives of those people theology took place as they struggled with their hopes in a living God and with their sorrows at the feet of death. Their theology was not filled with abstract universals far removed from the realities of their everyday lives. Their theology was not sanitized and sterilized by ideologies that made it impotent and irrelevant. It was a concrete, earthy, and messy theology. But it was a good theology enmeshed in the flesh and blood existence of human life. It was not a theology that sought to escape to another world or that sought to circumvent death and suffering. It was a theology that faced them head on. It was a theology built on hope in the midst of sorrow. It was a theology that sought liberation and relief from suffering. It was a theology that sought the presence of God in the everyday. The people who went each day to pray at the altar and to light a candle were people who firmly believed that God was at work in their world. And with each prayer and each candle they hoped for a little miracle and for a better day.

However, these peoples hope did not ignore the realities of life. Those people kissing the feet of a dead Jesus were facing the realities of death and suffering which they knew so well. In that kiss there was both hope and despair. There was hope in their recognition that the same God who was present with them in their lives was also present with them in the midst of death and suffering. The omnipresence of God was not an abstract philosophical concept, but a tangible reality at the feet of the dead Jesus. But there also was despair at the feet of the dead Jesus. At the feet of Jesus they knew the depth of evils and injustices that so often overshadow the tender mercies of a living God. At the feet of Jesus they realized that the struggle for justice often led them by the way of the cross. And at the feet of Jesus they knew that their prayers were often met by the silence of a dead god buried in the sepulcher of dead churches. In this crucible of hope and sorrow a new theology took shape.

My own experiences as a child living across the street from the Cathedral left a profound affect upon how I perceive my task as a theologian and how I perceive both the struggles and hopes of Hispanic Americans. Theology has to be done at the feet of the dead Jesus. It has to speak to the atrocities and unjust structures that lead to the crucifixion of Jesus and which still lead to the crucifixion of countless people. Theology has to struggle with both the sorrow and the hope of the people that stand at the foot of the cross to kiss the feet of a God who truly understands them.

Similarly, my work as a pastor of Hispanic Baptist missions in Florida and Kentucky also had a profound effect upon my theology. During my senior year in college, I was asked to pastor a fledgling language mission in Florida. Most of the parishioners were migrant workers who worked in the farms near my college town. They lived in rundown houses and overcrowded trailers that were hot in the Summer and cold in the Winter. Life in the fields was not easy. When work was available, the people worked hard from sunrise to sunset. On the weekend the older children also worked in the fields to help their families earn a living. Their meager pay was not based on the hours they worked, but on the amount of crops that they gathered. Their swollen feet and calloused hands were often silent testimonies to their hardships. When work was no longer available in the fields, they would move to a new area in the hopes of finding new work. Most of the men, women, and children in my little congregation dreamed of a better life, but had little hope of ever living it.

I have many memories of that little mission, but the one that affected me the most was on my last day as their pastor. As I was getting ready to leave the mission to attend seminary, I stood at the back of our chapel gathering my things. The man who had been serving as the church secretary and treasurer sat quietly counting what few dollars the people could afford to give. After he finished, he looked up at me and stared into my eyes as I got ready to leave. To this day I still remember his words: "Ya nos abandonas" ("So now you abandon us").

Through the years, the experience of Hispanics, as well as that of other minorities in the United States, has been one of abandonment and exile. The people feel abandoned by the indifference of politicians and by the silence of the churches. Our brightest scholars and ministers abandon the plight of the people. According to David Abalos, in his book entitled *Latinos in the United States*, our best scholars, seduced by the detachment of academic training, turn peoples and beliefs into abstractions that "move us away from the concrete, the subject, the personal, the touchstone of reality."<sup>3</sup> Ministers seduced by the power of their pulpit and the promise of advancement abandon the struggles of their congregations. Parents are abandoned by their children who lose their culture and are slowly assimilated, devoured, and muted, but never accepted, by the dominant culture. Churches are abandoned by their most promising youth who are drawn by the promises and programs of wealthy suburban churches. And ministers who are often abandoned by their denominations, are left struggling in abject poverty to sustain God's presence in places where angels often fear to tread. These people can kiss the feet of the dead Jesus because in the cross He knows their abandonment. Our theology and our ministry need to speak to those who are

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<sup>3</sup> *Latinos in the United States: The Sacred and the Political* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1986), p. 2.



abandoned.

As a child, I remember dreaming of the day when I could go to the United States. I remember sitting with my family on the balcony of our house across the street of the Cathedral where people went to pray. I remember sitting there listening to the "Voice of America," the United States Government radio station broadcast into Latin America. My family and I often sat under the night sky dreaming of the freedom and opportunities found in "America." The Voice of America had told us to come to a land of freedom and opportunity, but some years later I found that only some were truly free and the opportunities offered to us were to clean floors and work in factories. I found myself exiled in this strange land where all is not as it seems. I realized that all was not like I pictured while sitting in my balcony in Cuba in the house across the street from the Cathedral where people came to pray. Hispanics, African-Americans, and other minorities were marginalized in many respects. Although food was abundant, people still went without. Growing up in the inner city of Miami's Little Havana, I saw many friends turn to drugs and alcohol as their only source of hope. It also was difficult to be isolated from the violence of the inner city. I got stabbed in the hand in a knife fight and played Russian roulette while at school. I slowly realized that the idyllic pictures of America were reserved for a precious few, while the rest of us were pitted against one another to fight for the left-overs. In the middle of this despair, I turned to the church as my source of hope, and found the hope of a living God at the feet of a dead Jesus. I found a Jesus who understood the suffering and death that surrounded us. At the foot of the cross, I could kiss the feet of a Jesus who had known exile, violence, suffering, and hopelessness.

Years later, as I ministered to the migrant workers in Florida, I encountered other fellow exiles. These were people who were exiles in their own land. Mexican-Americans who lived here when this was still Mexico, but who are now told to go home. Immigrants who came in search of a better life only to be enslaved and forgotten by society. Slaves who were brought against their wills and are still enslaved by social and economic structures shrouded in rhetorics of freedom and opportunities. Natives whose lands were plundered as they were forced into smaller and desolate places. Single mothers and the working poor struggling to make a living out of nothing. Children left homeless, playing in the urban jungles full of crime and despair. All of these people who are exiles in their own land truly know what it is like to be abandoned. These are the people who both hope and despair at the feet of a dead Jesus. These are the people abandoned by the silence of the churches and theologians.

In the wake of growing anti-Hispanic sentiments and regressive policies against all minorities, churches need to take a stand. It has taken me many years to realize why the people kissed the feet of the dead Jesus. In that act they

recognize their hope in a God who dies and suffer with them. A God who lives in solidarity with their struggles. And they also assert their despair at the silence of death.<sup>4</sup> I often wondered why I refused to kiss the feet of that dead Jesus. The dead God whom I refused to kiss as a child was not the living God who stood with us. It was not the God of Christianity. The dead god that I refused to kiss as a child was and is the God of churches who remain silent in the midst of oppression. It is the dead god of philosophers whose immutability promotes indifference and whose impassibility renders it impotent. It is the dead God of the churches and theologians who are content with the status quo. That god is the god of the churches which Feuerbach and Nietzsche criticized. It is the dead God of churches who build lofty temples while people starve at their doorstep. It is the impotent and apathetic god that we have set as an idol over us.

We need a new vision that will overcome the blindness of the churches that fail to see their limited perspectives and fail to speak truly to the needs of the people. Mainline congregations often deceive themselves as they minister to Hispanics and other minorities. They deceive themselves into thinking that they are truly speaking to the condition of the people. They deceive themselves through outreach programs that do not change the structures of the people they touch while keeping the people at a distance from their middle class churches. Instead of outreach we need to be doing inreach. But instead these churches hire others to do the ministry for them and pretend that they are the ones who are doing the ministering, when in reality they are merely the patrons who hold the power and the purse strings. They seek to impact others, but do not allow themselves to be impacted by the faith and plight of the people to whom they minister. Others deceive themselves by their calls for multi-culturalism which often is only another means of assimilation. Once more they do not allow themselves to be impacted by the minorities in their congregation. Rather, it is the norms of the dominant culture that rule the church and render the minorities silent by denying them their own voice and their own space. The silence of the churches, the marginalization of society, the dissolution of our self-identity, and the structures of oppression do not allow Hispanic Americans a place and time of their own. As Virgilio Elizondo has said so well, the ontological reality of Mexican-Americans, the core of their existence, is one defined by non-being.<sup>5</sup> This is also the case for most Hispanic Americans. It is often easier to say who we are not than to say who we are. We are misunderstood, rejected, and abandoned.

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<sup>4</sup> Virgilio Elizondo writes about this concept in his book *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), pp. 41-43. According to him, both the cross and Good Friday are powerful symbols for Mexican-Americans because they can fully identify with the suffering and rejection represented by the cross.

<sup>5</sup> *The Future is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet* (New York: Crossroads, 1992), p. 20.



It is unfortunate that churches are deaf to the cries of Hispanics and many other minorities. It is unfortunate that theologians have been silent to the needs of the marginalized. On the other hand, Hispanic Americans do have many things to offer to the churches if they would only listen. Our Hispanicity is a mixture of races and cultures. In this *mestizaje* and *mulataje*, we partake in each other while maintaining our diversity.<sup>6</sup> The Hispanic reality cannot be defined by any given standard, norm, or category. As I am reminded by my mother, I have relatives who are black. I also have relatives who are Asian, Anglos, and a mixture of many other races. In the diversity of my family I am reminded that the African, the Asian, the European, the Arab, the Jew, and the Native American are all part of my family. We are all family. And in this diversity we also encounter the human face of a God incarnate in the concrete images of many people who are my family and who are made in the image of God. And in their suffering, I suffer together with God. We are a diverse people. But out of this diversity a new ecumenism has emerged which does not irradiate differences or diluted beliefs. Rather, it is a new bond fostered by our shared struggle and our common plight. At the feet of the dead Jesus we encounter this new ecumenism fostered out of our shared identity and struggle. As we kiss the feet of the dead Jesus together we also hope in the resurrection of the living God that sees us through suffering and death, and empowers us to live in spite of it.

As North American Hispanic theologians have begun to plumb the depth of the people's faith, they have discovered a rich source for theology in the lives of the people. At the feet of the dead Jesus a new theology can be found. Abstract categories and universals help us gain a sweeping vision, but often miss the details of ordinary life. It is in the concrete that life finds meaning and significance while the abstract universal serves only as their context.<sup>7</sup> We do not eat abstractions. We eat food. We do not drink ideals. We drink water. In our spiritual quests we often miss the realities of our bodily existence, and in our philosophical inquiries we often forget that the most difficult questions come from our struggles. It is in these experiences that we must begin our theology, and it is to these experiences that we must both speak and act. In his book, *Mañana*, Justo González reminds us that while our society can easily continue without its intellectual elite, it would

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<sup>6</sup> Once more, Elizondo's term, *mestizaje* indicates a synthesis of races, cultures, and traditions that affirms the different identities received while creating a new reality (Ibid., p. 84).

<sup>7</sup> Even Alfred North Whitehead, the prominent process philosopher, recognized that meaning occurred in the finite and the concrete that delineated and defined reality. For instance, see his article "Mathematics and the Good," in *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead*, Paul Arthur Schilpp, editor (La Salle: Open Court, 1951), pp. 670-674.

quickly collapse without "those who pick lettuce, cook food, and collect garbage."<sup>8</sup> In light of this, he calls us to do our theology in manner that includes "aching bones and dirt under the fingernails." And I tell you today, that unless we do theology in a new light that includes our share of aching bones and dirt under our fingernails, theology will die. Yes, theology might survive in the academies as a dead language that speaks to no one but a few archaic intellectuals who cherish abstractions and impassionate observations. If theology truly to survive into the Twentieth Century, it must learn to listen to the people who pray to a living God and kiss the feet of a dead Jesus. Theology must face the struggle, suffering, abandonment and death that are found at the foot of the cross. Theology must learn to articulate and give a voice to those people who kiss the feet of a dead Jesus while worshipping a living God. It must speak to their needs, and even more so, it must act together with them to bring forth the hope of our resurrection. And, it is at the feet of our dead Jesus that we find the hope of the resurrection of our living God.

### *Resumen*

*Nosotros entendemos a Dios y a nuestro mundo a través de ciertas perspectivas limitadas. Si esas perspectivas se vuelven ideologías sin reconocer sus límites, pueden volverse instrumentos de opresión. En este relato, les presento cómo ciertas experiencias propias han afectado mi teología y ministerio. La teología tiene que considerar el sufrimiento y la esperanza que yo encontré en la acción de personas que besaban los pies del Cristo crucificado en la Catedral un Viernes Santo. En ese acto se identificaban con el Cristo y el Dios que conocía el sufrimiento del pueblo. La experiencia del pueblo latino se identifica con ese acto porque ellos también han conocido el sufrimiento, el abandono, y el dolor. En ese acto las personas expresaban esperanza en un Dios vivo que conocía el sufrimiento del mundo. Las iglesias y el pueblo hispano se sienten abandonados por la cultura predominante. La teología que se preocupa con conceptos abstractos y no encuentra cómo expresar estas dimensiones de la fe del pueblo Latino no es eficaz. La teología necesita hablar a esas necesidades y darles voz a las voces de aquellos que han sido abandonados por las iglesias y por los teólogos.*

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<sup>8</sup> Mañana: *Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), p. 129.



# On Becoming 'Apiru: An Agenda for Latino Theology

C. Gilbert Romero

Marginality has always characterized the quest for social order. In spite of attempts by leaders to structure society in as subjectively benevolent terms as possible, there are always those who for one reason or another remain marginalized. Reasons for marginality may vary, but the very fact of "outsider" status renders one powerless in decisions affecting one's life as a member of that society. How is it possible to deal creatively with the status of marginality--on whatever level? In response, I would propose examination of a little known political movement in biblical times embodied in the group name 'APIRU.

During the latter part of the 19th century, in a small Egyptian village along the river Nile called Tell-el-Amarna, tablets dating from about the 15th century B.C.E. were discovered. These tablets chronicled complaints to pharaoh from local kings about difficulties with certain groups of people who were causing all kinds of problems against the established order, basically challenging the rights of the king. Members of this group were known as 'APIRU, as was their movement of challenging the status quo.

In a monograph on power in the biblical tradition (*The Mighty From Their Thrones*, Fortress, 1987), J.P.M. Walsh discusses the 'APIRU movement in the context of theology and the Bible. According to Walsh, being 'APIRU meant withdrawal, voluntary or no, from dominant society, either as rebellion or its non-violent analogue. In whatever form it took, to be 'APIRU presented a threat, real or imagined, to the established order. Naturally, leadership in the established order could not tolerate such threats, so the 'APIRU had to be dealt with accordingly.

Several scholars, along with Walsh, opine that the origins of Israel in the pre-monarchic period in Canaan followed the lines of the 'APIRU movement. Soon after settling in the land of Canaan, Israel continued to believe in Yahweh and did not fully accept the Canaanite gods, thus maintaining her belief system as source of spiritual strength. And since politics and religion generally tend to be tightly interlaced, this Israelite non-acceptance of Canaanite gods was considered a threat to the existing Canaanite polity.

Though the 'APIRU were considered disruptive in other arenas as well, the religious arena was the crucial one. Consequently, because of their singular religious beliefs the Israelites were viewed as 'APIRU, namely as non-conformist

outsiders challenging the status quo by not adapting, and were so treated. The story of the ensuing struggle between 'APIRU-Israel and the Canaanites is told in the Bible as one version of the "conquest." As if to strengthen further the connection, there are those in the biblical guild who see an etymological affinity between 'APIRU and HEBREW.

If I read Walsh correctly, he seems to postulate three stages in the 'APIRU emergence. First, becoming 'APIRU was not always an ideological choice. Marginality was often effected from without, such as through physical, psychological or social needs. Marginality results in powerlessness. So 'APIRU-Israel as a powerless entity needed a "protector" to survive, and that protector turned out to be Yahweh their god. Secondly, Yahweh himself was marginal in the sense that he was not always at the service of the lords of the established order. Third, Yahweh exercises protectorship through guidance and "works of wonder" as is evident in Israel's early history. Through this manifestation of divine, compassionate love, or HESED, 'APIRU-Israel, in special relation with Yahweh, becomes a self-respecting and self-affirming people and is thus able to confront the Canaanites.

How does all this relate to Latino theology? Actually, the basis of relating theologically has its fundament in the cultural aspect of Latino religious belief, be it Catholic or Protestant. It could relate to any group that feels marginated. But for the sake of discussion, let us speak of the U.S. Latino church context, specifically the U.S. Latino Catholic church context with which I am more familiar.

First of all, by virtue of not being of the dominant culture of the established leadership in the U.S. church, Latino Catholics are de facto marginalized with regard to their systems of belief, worship, and discipline. This marginality, depending on how it responds/relates to pre-determined norms, may or may not be perceived as a threat to the established order by the leadership. This marginality places them in the status of 'APIRU.

Secondly, Latino Catholics through their belief and worship systems, nourished by native culture, can relate to God as one who while sharing marginality (as in the life of Jesus), has a personal affection for them as a people. This relationship is further nourished in and through devotional piety which demonstrates repeatedly God's compassionate love.

Thirdly, personal relationship with God becomes a bulwark for the Latino Catholic in dealing with the often negative effects of marginality. Strengthening the relationship strengthens the sense of specialness, and therefore strengthens the hope of responding creatively to marginality. The crucial element, it seems to me, in fortifying the divine-human relationship is the dynamic of exchange possible only



in a comfortable mutuality of acceptance and understanding. The culturally based belief system, which we know as *religiosidad popular*, provides such a comfortable mutuality for the welcome exchange. Indeed, this is what makes the process theological in the first place.

Finally, any Latino, Catholic or Protestant, can and should become 'APIRU. Becoming 'APIRU in the biblical sense means recognizing marginal status in the established society for whatever reason, and seeing that status as threatening to the powers that be. It means also relating to God as fellow outcast in a world of multiple idols and receiving affirmation in that relationship, then challenging the dominant society in as creative a way as possible. One of the most creative challenges most likely could come as fruitful reflection based on a contemporary significance of culturally based religious beliefs. In other words, Latinos are given the challenge of relating *religiosidad popular* to the lived reality of marginalization through the model of 'APIRU. Now, effective acceptance of that challenge would be a real agenda for Latino theology.

### *Resumen*

*Tomando el tema de los 'APIRU en la antigua historia del Medio Oriente, el presente artículo sugiere que en cierto modo lo que los latinos tenemos que hacer es tomar de ellos y de su situación para desarrollar la agenda para nuestra teología. Los 'APIRU fueron un pueblo marginado que se nutrió de sus tradiciones y religión para sobrevivir. Así, el pueblo latino, marginado en la presente sociedad, se nutre de sus tradiciones, y específicamente de su religiosidad popular, para subsistir.*

## Apuntes bibliográficos

Pablo A. Jiménez

*Comunicación con la juventud: Diseño para una nueva pastoral.* Daniel S. Schipani, et. al. San Juan: Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, 1994. 126 pp. Paper.

In the Hispanic community, there is a need for bibliographical resources that blend good scholarship, contextualized theological insight, and sound practical advice on pastoral matters. *Comunicación con la juventud* belongs to this rare breed. The book compiles papers read at the Third James W. Carty Lectures, held at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico (ESPR) in 1994. It is divided into parts. The first one, named "Vision and foundations", contains three remarkable chapters written by Schipani. They combine developmental psychology, Fowler's stages of faith and elements of Hispanic theology --ecclesiological insights inspired by the work of Orlando Costas. The second part, "Principles for a contextualized pastoral practice," offers three other articles written by ESPR faculty members. In this section, the article on sexuality --written by Luis R. Rivera Rodríguez-- stands out for its erudition. An appendix, containing another article and a sermon, complete the book. The book also offers questions for group discussion and suggested activities that Christian educators will appreciate. Even though the book has been written with the particular context of Puerto Rico in mind, surely Hispanics in the United States will find it a useful tool for youth ministries.

*The Hispanic Challenge: Opportunities Confronting the Church,* by Manuel Ortiz. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993. Pp. 194. Paper.

In *The Hispanic Challenge* Manuel Ortiz offers an engaging introduction to Latino reality. The book is divided into three sections. The first one is a sociohistoric overview of the situation of Hispanics in the United States. The second section discusses missiological and ecclesiological issues. The third addresses issues of leadership training and education. The book ends calling Hispanic leaders to develop mentoring programs that may help young Latinos to develop their leadership skills.

The first section of the book is just excellent. The demographic, historical and ethnographic material are remarkably useful both for Latinos and for non-Hispanics interested on the topic. Where the book falls short is in the theological section. Ortiz does not employ many key principles of Hispanic theology, such as *Mestizaje*. Nonetheless, *The Hispanic Challenge* is a very useful introductory manual. Both students and professors will appreciate Ortiz's contribution to Latino theological thought.



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Pablo Sosa, Methodist musician and composer, Argentina  
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